

Hawaii MARINE ON POINT

HAWAII MARINE D SECTION

FEBRUARY 18, 2005

Operation Spurs

Hawaii Marines take fight to enemy in Afghani mountains

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Combined Joint Task Force 76

KUNAR PROVINCE, Afghanistan — 3rd Battalion, 3rd Marines, completed Operation Spurs as part of a combined Coalition and government of Afghanistan offensive against terrorist threats in Afghanistan during the winter months.

During the operation, Marines could be seen leaping from CH-47 Chinook helicopters that were hovering just above the jagged, snow-covered mountains that ring the Korangal Valley. Troops from India and Lima Companies inserted into different parts of the valley, quickly cordoned off the area, and searched several houses that were believed to be hideouts for mid-level Taliban and HIG leaders and fighters.

"We flew in fast and low and jumped off just outside one of our main target's house," said 2nd Lt. Caleb Weiss, a Lima Company platoon commander. "They couldn't

have had more than a few moments to react to having entire platoons dropped on their heads.

"The Marines charged into the village and quickly established a presence, preventing the possibility of their targets escaping. The Marines then detained several men suspected of being members or supporters of anti-government forces without having to fire a single shot.

With helicopter pilots performing precarious two-wheel landings over the treacherous mountain terrain, and the Marines' and Sailors' willingness to eagerly take the fight to the enemy — no matter the "clime or place," America's Battalion sent a clear message that security threats to Afghanistan will not be tolerated or allowed to remain in the Korangal Valley.

The Battalion has maintained its high operational tempo despite harsh weather conditions, in an effort to disrupt the activity of anti-government forces during a time when Taliban and Al Queda elements operating in Afghanistan have, in the past, taken time to reorganize and recuperate. Insurgents, preparing for renewed attacks on Afghan and Coalition targets in the spring using heavy snowfall and plummeting temperatures to mask their activity, will continue to be sought out by Marine-driven initiatives throughout the harsh Afghan winter said 3/3's Battalion Commander, Lt. Col. Norm Cooling.

"Regardless of how difficult the terrain and weather might be, we have the training, equipment and commitment to take the fight to those continuing to sponsor and conduct terrorist activities in the Kunar Province and that is precisely what we are doing," said Cooling. "We are not going to sit around and worry about them exploiting the local populace and attacking us. We are going to keep them worried about us bringing the attack to them."

If insurgents hiding there were distressed to see the arrival of the Marines, many residents of Korangal happily welcomed the Marines and Navy Corpsmen of the Battalion. With the assistance of Afghan doctors, soldiers from the Asadabad Provincial Reconstruction Team and female military police officers from the 58th MP Co., 25th Infantry Division, they distributed winter coats, medication and offered medical assistance to nearly 500 sick villagers and their children throughout the Korangal area.

"It's great to be able to help the people by giving them medicine and supplies they need," said Army Spc. Dayna Urbank, military police officer from Uniontown, Ohio. "We're not here just to search houses and detain people. If we show them respect and help them, they'll see that their government can offer them a much better way of life than any of the terrorist groups can."

Several Lima Company Marines also met with the Korangal village elders, who expressed thanks for the medical supplies and coats. One of the elders, who fought the Russians with the mujahedeen, said that the new peace in Afghanistan was a welcome change and he looked forward to a time when it wouldn't be necessary for Marines and the Afghan National Army to look for terrorists in his village.

"We are happy to have the security here and to receive the medical attention you provide us," said one of the elders who hosted the Marines for a meal in his home. Coalition forces hope to further solidify support among the village elders of the Kunar province by continuing to improve conditions and eliminate threats from insurgents.

Operation Thunder Freedom continues as America's Battalion and Combined Joint Task Force 76, with the government of Afghanistan, assess and seek to eliminate threats along the Afghan-Pakistan border.

Above left — Marines from America's Battalion leap from a CH-47 Chinook helicopter hovering just above the snowy hills of Korangal during their insertion for Operation Spurs.

Left — Marines and Sailors from 3rd Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment "stack" on a fence moments before entering another house during their exhaustive cordon and search of a village in the Korangal Valley of Afghanistan.



Lima Company machinegunner, Josh Ploetz, looks over the sights of his M240G machinegun as a CH-47 Chinook helicopter prepares to drop medical supplies near the Marines' position high in the Hindu Kuch mountains during Operation Spurs.



Second Lt. Caleb Weiss, platoon commander, Lima Company, leads his Marines toward the next house during a village search.



Lance Cpl. Dan Robert, squad automatic weapon gunner with Lima Company, charges forward through the deep snow of the Hindu Kush mountains to his squad's next objective.

